

VZCZCXRO0171
RR RUEHIK
DE RUEHCP #0069/01 0360703
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 050703Z FEB 10 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5478
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 COPENHAGEN 000069

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR S/SECC, OES, EUR/NB

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KGHG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [DA](#)
SUBJECT: (SBU) DENMARK: GOVERNMENT WEATHERS COP-15 AFTERMATH

REF: A) 09 STATE 132367
B) 09 COPENHAGEN 537

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(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED--NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Unrealistic public expectations for the outcome of COP-15 and initial confusion over how to interpret the Copenhagen Accord led to intense media and opposition questioning of Denmark's role as host of the conference, in particular focused on PM Lars Loekke Rasmussen's performance as President of the COP. In response, the Government has defended the Copenhagen Accord as the best outcome possible at COP-15 and a positive step forward toward a legally binding agreement, and public interest appears to be shifting to other issues.

¶2. (SBU) While it remains publicly committed to pursue a legally binding accord under its COP presidency (which ends in December when Mexico assumes that role at the next COP in Cancun), we note signs that the Government seeks to play a less exposed role in international negotiations this year, preferring to work privately with the UN, Mexico, and the EU in search of a way forward. Denmark will continue to be a useful partner on climate, especially on Copenhagen Accord implementation, and we will continue to work closely with the Government and others in pursuit of shared interests. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) The Danish Government (like the USG) admits that the Copenhagen Accord did not fulfil all its hopes for COP-15, but defends the Accord as an important outcome of the COP-15 climate conference. Critics, including the parliamentary opposition, have criticized the Accord for its non-binding nature and criticized PM Lars Loekke Rasmussen for a weak performance as President of the 15th Conference of Parties (COP-15) climate conference held in Copenhagen December 7-18, 2009 (for a complete description of the COP-15 endgame and results, see Ref A).

¶4. (SBU) National media have fully aired opinions about the handling and results of this historic event for Denmark, to the point where public interest is beginning to reach saturation levels. Most awkward for the Government has been a focus on the PM's performance during COP-15. Danish conservative daily 'Berlingske Tidende' cites an unnamed Foreign Ministry source who reportedly witnessed an angry Prime Minister dressing down his leading climate advisor, Bo Lidegaard, in front of Danish delegates during COP15 after feeling himself humiliated by foreign diplomats when he assumed the chair of the conference as it entered the crucial final days. Press have also highlighted procedural errors made by Rasmussen while in the chair, and the opposition has criticized the PM for "throwing in the towel" by giving up the chair in the waning hours of the conference after being thwarted by stubborn opposition from the ALBA countries to COP approval of the Copenhagen Accord. One anonymous analyst charged that the PM was unprepared to assume leadership over this international event, and letting him do so was equivalent to "throwing him to the sharks."

Defending the Accord

15. (SBU) In several public appearances since COP-15, PM Rasmussen and new Climate Minister Lykke Friis have answered pointed questions from the press and the opposition on the significance of the Copenhagen Accord and the way ahead before Parliament. While freely admitting the Accord was not ideal, they have defended it as the best agreement possible at COP-15, and an important step forward towards a binding international agreement to address climate change.

16. (SBU) In an appearance before Parliament on January 26, the PM was faulted by the opposition for his inability to push through a legally binding agreement. Social Democrat climate spokesperson Mette Gjerskov criticized a "much too close" Danish alliance with the U.S. in the lead-up to the COP, saying "it was not enough just to get Obama to town and hope to then buy the votes of developing nations." Gjerskov said the PM had chaired COP-15 "as though it was a village hall discussion, not a gathering of world leaders," and urged the government to admit its mistakes and assume greater responsibility for the negotiating process in the lead-up to COP-16 in Mexico. Continuing, she declared that "it is now over a month since delegates saw their COP15 chairman throw in the towel and walk out of the conference and nobody has seen or heard from him since. No meetings have been called, no strategy has been laid out. Where's the leadership? Our Prime Minister seems to be suffering from a climate coma."

17. (SBU) In response, PM Rasmussen defended the accord as the best possible outcome and a reflection of "the art of the possible" and "the reality of the situation." The PM said the Copenhagen Accord was an important step forward towards a binding agreement that remains the end goal of the Government. While acknowledging the

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opposition had a right to try to label the outcome of the COP a 'disaster,' the PM said that view displayed "a very modest understanding of what was--and is--at stake in the international climate debate." On forming alliances, the PM dismissed the criticism and indicated that he sees a much broader alliance behind the Copenhagen Accord. The accord, he said, was supported by countries responsible for more than 80 percent of global CO2-emissions.

Friis to the Front--Still Ambitious

18. (SBU) Climate and Energy Minister Lykke Friis, who assumed her ministerial duties when her predecessor, Connie Hedegaard, stepped down just before COP-15 (see Ref B), told Parliament on January 26 that Denmark was committed to pursuing international collaboration on climate change along all tracks (i.e. UN, Kyoto, Copenhagen Accord).

19. (SBU) To do so, she said, Denmark will specifically:
--Work with EU and other developed countries on delivering the finance outlined in the accord;
--coordinate its efforts with the UN, Mexico, Germany (for the June UNFCCC meeting in Bonn);
--keep working through diplomatic channels, via its embassy climate attaches in strategic countries (adding a new one in Mexico City and extending its current attache in South Africa, in anticipation of South Africa's hosting of COP-17 in 2011);
--the Minister said she would attend the World Economic Forum in Doha January 26-27, and would subsequently visit Delhi (Feb 5-6, coupled with a visit to Beijing).
(Note: Friis' staff told REO on January 26 that she is also considering whether and when to continue her predecessor's "Greenland Dialogue" process.)

But Not Too Ambitious

110. (SBU) PM Rasmussen has flatly rejected calls from the

opposition and - intriguingly - from some within the governing coalition (specifically from the Conservative Party of former Climate Minister and EC Commissioner-designate Connie Hedegaard), for more ambitious international leadership by Denmark on climate issues in the wake of COP-15. On January 13 during another appearance before Parliament, the PM was denounced by Social Liberal Party leader Margrethe Vestager for "trying to lead from the back seat." Instead, she said, "Denmark could do something on its own. We should say: first we will go for 30 percent, and we are willing to go even further."

¶11. (SBU) Rasmussen responded that "we could say 100 percent. We could declare that we will end the consumption of fossil fuels by the end of the year, then we would have made a marginal, marginal contribution to the fight against global warming. Because even if we did, even if the whole EU did, even if all developed nations of the world did it, it would still not be enough to reach the 2 degrees target. We would then probably have set ourselves some challenges that are...very challenging financially. It's about balance. And I accept that there is a positive competitive effect of being a frontrunner, but there is also a competitive disadvantage by being too much of a front-runner, and therefore the right place for this discussion right here and now is (within) the EU."

Comment

¶12. (SBU) COP-15 was certainly a disappointment to the Danish Government in that it did not provide the public relations boost it had hoped for. Yet neither was it a bust--the opposition has not been noticeably boosted, and recriminations over COP-15 seem to be losing public interest, especially as implementation of the Copenhagen Accord gathers steam. Instead, Danes seem eager to leave the mixed results of COP-15 behind, choosing to move on to focus political debate on other issues. Polls show a slight opposition lead over the government, but that edge was not significantly affected by COP-15. That said, emerging disagreements within the governing coalition and with the opposition over international climate negotiations have the potential to play out further, with electoral implications.

¶13. (SBU) While the outcome of COP-15 is not directly destabilizing the Rasmussen Government in the short term, the PM appears chastened by his experience and unlikely to risk further high-stakes appearances on the international stage. We expect Minister Friis to now assume a more visible role enunciating Danish climate policy, as Denmark transitions to a more modest role in international negotiations. As COP-15 president for the remainder of 2010, however, Denmark will remain an important player in international climate negotiations, and we will continue to work together with the

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Government on shared interests in encouraging full implementation of the Copenhagen Accord and building support for an effective international agreement. In coordination with the Department, we will engage with Minister Friis to exchange views on the best way forward.

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